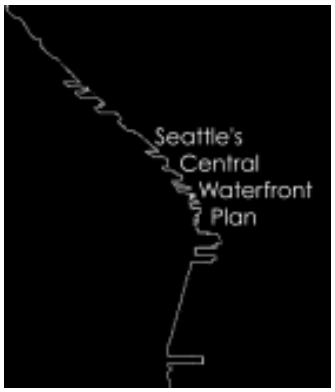

Central Waterfront Plan Background Report

Precedent Study

DRAFT
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city design

PLANNING AREA

URBAN WATERFRONT PRECEDENT STUDY

INTRODUCTION

To envision what the future of Seattle's Central Waterfront might be, first it is helpful to understand Seattle's current waterfront and determine what combination of characteristics creates its distinct identity. For instance, what kinds of activities are taking place? What is the relationship between the waterfront and inland areas? What occurs on the water side of the shoreline? These questions aim to describe key qualities of Seattle's waterfront. We can then look at these same characteristics to measure other waterfronts and assess how they might compare.

SE View of Pier 70, Seattle, Washington

CHARACTERISTICS

In assessing Seattle's Central Waterfront, some key characteristics consistently come to the fore. These characteristics include: function, natural conditions, relationship of the waterfront with both inland areas and the water itself, implementation mechanisms, and planning principles.

Function

Primary functions include a transportation corridor for rail and vehicular movement, port activities (cruise ship and cargo terminals) and regional ferry operations, public recreation and access, tourist-related retail and a small residential component.

Natural Conditions

The Central Waterfront is located on a deep-water bay. Natural conditions include strong tidal variation and exposure to the elements. The existing environment is dramatically altered from original, "natural" conditions. The shoreline area is a flat area created by fill. In many areas, the shoreline is at the base of bluffs that separate it from upland areas. While there are seasonal variations, the area is usable year round. There are water and sediment quality issues and the nearshore area is key to fish migration.

Pier 55, Seattle, Washington

Relationship with adjacent inland areas and the water

This relationship with adjacent areas is described in terms of the integration of activities and visual and physical accessibility between areas. Because of the area's functions and natural constraints, waterfront activities exist somewhat independently of activities occurring further inland. Adjacent inland areas have a mix of uses, including housing, office and retail. The scale of development provides a transition area between the shoreline and the densely developed downtown core located further inland. While inland areas are highly populated, poor access limits waterfront use. Barriers to physical accessibility include the Alaskan Way Viaduct, Alaskan Way, and steep topography, particularly on the northern end of the waterfront. The steep elevation changes that constrain physical access to the waterfront create waterfront view corridors along east/west streets.

On the waterside, there is substantial "over-water" development that brings activity to this side of the shoreline edge. Pier structures provide some opportunities for public access out into the water. However, over-water pier structures obstruct views of Elliott Bay.

Ownership/Control

The majority of properties in the area are under public control, with the Port of Seattle and the City of Seattle, through controls over rights-of-way, having the greatest ownership. The State's Department of Natural Resources exercises substantial control over waterside development.

Regulatory Framework

Development on the waterfront is regulated through the Seattle Land Use Code which specifies different land use zones, marine shoreline regulations found in the Shoreline Management Act, and federal, state and local regulations which govern development within the harbor area of the waterfront.

Planning Principles

Seattle's Central Waterfront Planning is in the process of developing planning principles to guide the waterfront toward achieving some fundamental goals. These planning principles include the following: increase public access and use; promote diverse uses, authenticity and sustainability; and maintain a transportation corridor. Currently, the Central Waterfront maintains a transportation corridor and provides, to some degree, public access and diverse use. Other desired aims are sustainability in future redevelopment, better connections to inland areas, better public access and pedestrian access, promotion of diverse uses and the idea of authenticity, a waterfront that feels vibrant and alive.

URBAN WATERFRONT PRECEDENT STUDY

An Initial Overview

Which characteristics do other waterfronts share with Seattle's Central Waterfront and where are there differences? This table describes key characteristics of Seattle's Central Waterfront and provides a comparison with waterfronts in Chicago, IL, Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, and Vancouver B.C., Canada.

WATERFRONT	FUNCTION	NATURAL CONDITIONS	USE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WATERFRONT AND INLAND AREAS
SEATTLE, WA Central Waterfront	- Transportation corridor - Regional transportation hub - Port activity - Public access and recreation - Tourist-related retail	- Bay - Limited shoreline - Tidal variation - Marine wildlife issues - Artificial shoreline (fill) - Exposed	- Waterfront activities are separate from inland activities - Transition area between shoreline and downtown core
CHICAGO, IL Lakeshore	- Public access and recreation - Pedestrian promenade - Lesser transportation corridor	- Lake - River confluence - Open shoreline - Flat topography	- Uses compatible, but not integrated
PORTLAND, OR Central Waterfront	- Public access and recreation - Open space	- River	- Uses compatible, but not integrated
SAN FRANCISCO, CA South Beach-NE Waterfront	- Public access and recreation - Transportation corridor with local focus - Regional passenger ferries	- Bay - Extensive peninsula shoreline - Limited over-water development	- Uses compatible, but not integrated - Downtown core extends to waterfront
VANCOUVER, B.C. CANADA Burrard Inlet-Central Waterfront	- Residential - Port activities - Public access and recreation - Open space - Passenger ferries	- Bay - Extensive peninsula shoreline	- Uses compatible, but not integrated - Office core adjacent but not oriented toward waterfront - Redevelopment introducing new uses along shoreline

ACCESSIBILITY BETWEEN WATERFRONT AND INLAND AREAS	OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL	REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	CONSISTENT WITH SEATTLE'S CENTRAL WATERFRONT PLANNING PRINCIPLES? **- Increase public access & use** **- Promote diverse uses** **- Sustainability** **- Authenticity** **- Maintain transportation corridor**
- Barriers include: Alaskan Way Viaduct, Alaskan Way, steep topography - Strong waterfront view corridors	- Port, City, and State	- City land use code and shoreline regulations - State harbor regulations	- Currently maintains transportation corridor and some public access & use - Aims to be more sustainable, authentic, and better integrated with upland areas
- Open space and transportation corridor (Lakeshore Drive) separates waterfront from downtown	- City	- Land use code - Shoreline regulations	- Developed as public resource (open space, institutions, stadiums, etc.) - Not consistent with other planning principles
- Easily accessible	- City	- Land Use Code - Shoreline regulations	- Developed for open space/public access. Limited diversity, no transportation function
- Market Street meets waterfront - Embarcadero Highway was former barrier - Flat topography - Easily accessible - Well-connected to grid - Expansive water views	- Port, City and County	- Land Use Code - Shoreline regulations - Harbor regulations	- Aims to increase access & diverse use - Transportation function & sustainability not emphasized
- Topographical break between waterfront and inland area - Accessible via public access trail along shoreline - More limited access to upland areas	- Coal Harbor Redevelopment, City	- Land Use Code - Shoreline regulations	- Emphasizes public access & sustainability - Transportation corridor, diverse use not emphasized

HOW OTHER CITIES COMPARE

In looking at different waterfronts, such as the dock along the Harlem River, a river walk in Hartford, or a botanical garden in Barcelona, other questions come to mind. Is the land edge formed by a river, lake or bay? Do distinct activities and uses occur in adjacent areas, or do similar activities continue from the waterfront to neighboring inland areas? Similarly, is there strong physical and visual access between inland areas and the waterfront or are there barriers that limit connections to and from the waterfront? What type of implementation mechanisms are employed in moving waterfront redevelopment forward? To look to other waterfronts is to look for answers to some of these questions. In what respects does another waterfront differ from Seattle's, and in what ways is it similar? Which waterfronts have similar guiding principles and aspirations for the future? This process leads to some interesting insights. A radically different waterfront can still be instructive in the kind of public planning process it employs. Or, a waterfront redevelopment project with unsuccessful results can yield insights as to which pitfalls to avoid.

Harlem River, New York, New York

River Walk, Hartford, Connecticut

This document is an initial draft that looks at defining characteristics to describe Seattle's present Central Waterfront and the draft guiding principles that are under consideration to shape Seattle's future Central Waterfront. These characteristics and principles will be refined and used to review other urban waterfronts and see what Seattle shares with other places. Based on findings from this initial survey, a smaller number of waterfronts will be examined in greater detail to see what can be learned from the experiences of other waterfronts.

Function

The Boston Fish Pier, on the downtown waterfront in Boston, MA is an example of a project that showcases working marine-dependent activity. The decision was made in 1972 to restore the deteriorating pier structures to their original purpose. Given the gradual decline of fisheries in the area and of the Boston-based fleet in particular, this was a bold decision. A feasibility study was conducted that concluded that the fishing industry did not require all of the space in the pier buildings; the proposal, since acted upon, was to include office space as part of the redevelopment. It was intended that the rental income be used to help subsidize industry users.

An example of public recreation and access can be found in New Orleans, LA, and the Moonwalk project located along the Mississippi River. The river walk is well-used by locals and tourists alike. The project includes historical preservation and active tourist-related retail.

The Southeast False Creek project in Vancouver, B.C. has a densely-developed residential component along the waterfront. This project now includes approximately 2,000 residential units, 90,000 square feet of commercial space and 35 acres of parks.

The Fort Point Channel project in Boston, MA is an interesting example of one strategy used to combine a publicly accessible waterfront with a key transportation corridor. Fort Point Channel runs southwest from the main harbor, from Rowe's Wharf on Boston's waterfront, past South Station. It functions as a key linkage between downtown Boston and South Boston. Current proposals call for the transformation of the channel–now lined with aging office and warehouse buildings and dotted with construction barges, rusting bridges and rotting pilings–into a gleaming, 50-acre waterfront park. The ultimate goal is to create a Boston Common on the water.

The Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) is being extended from its current eastern end through a tunnel beneath South Boston to the Ted Williams Tunnel, Logan Airport and East Boston. Fort Point Channel, a narrow extension of Boston Harbor into South Boston, lies just east of the I-90/I-93 interchange. To cross the channel, engineers decided to use tunnel sections lowered into a trench. Including ramps, the channel crossing will carry nine lanes of traffic, four eastbound and five westbound.

Barcelona Botanical Garden,
Barcelona, Spain

Natural Conditions

In terms of natural conditions, Seattle's Central Waterfront's location on Elliott Bay makes for strong tidal fluctuations and a seawall structure that navigates the difference in land and water levels. This contrasts with Vancouver B.C.'s waterfront experience along Stanley Park which allows for more direct interaction with the water due to smaller tidal fluctuations and openings in the seawall. The Blur Building at the Swiss Expo 2002 exploits the natural conditions at the water's edge, literally bringing the clouds to earth.

Blur Building, Swiss Expo 2002,
Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Relationship with adjacent inland areas and the water

In the southern area of the Central Waterfront, topography is milder allowing for more accessibility between adjacent inland areas and the water. Further north, the land side is characterized by steep topography that makes connections to adjacent inland areas a challenge. In terms of visual access to the water, Seattle enjoys great view corridors to the waterfront from various vantage points around the city. This quality of visual access is shared by other cities like San Francisco.

Ownership/Control

While Seattle's public waterfront is defined by its management by the Port of Seattle and the City of Seattle, different redevelopment organizations, structures and implementation mechanisms are employed by different cities. Boston, MA employs a redevelopment authority, the Boston Redevelopment Authority to take charge of large-scale planning projects such as the Big Dig and Fort Point Channel.

Regulatory Framework

In Vancouver, B.C., former World Exposition sites have been purchased by private developers such as False Creek Redevelopment. The City

government is able to require public amenities from private developers such as public access to the water.

Planning Principles

In looking at other waterfronts, we also look at other cities that applied guiding principles for urban planning. Are these similar to the draft principles that Seattle is using in this waterfront envisioning process? Have other waterfronts created places that promote public access and use? Sustainability? Diverse use? Have other waterfronts maintained a key transportation corridor? For instance, the Yokohama International Passenger Terminal incorporates a multi-modal transportation hub at the waterfront.

Yokohama International Passenger Terminal, Osanbashi Pier, Yokohama, Japan

The idea of authenticity in terms of an experience or perception of a place as vital, true and authentic has come up in various discussions of the future of Seattle's Central Waterfront. What other waterfronts are perceived as authentic? What qualities lend themselves to an authentic place?

Vancouver, B.C. Southeast False Creek project is a leading example of sustainable development. The City of Vancouver took a leadership role to protect the environmental quality and in 1991 directed that Southeast False Creek be developed as a residential community that would stand as a model of sustainable development. The 80-acre site is the city's last undeveloped waterfront land, formerly industrial and now largely polluted and underused. The city is completing an official Development Plan for the new mixed-use neighborhood. Studies on transportation, energy, water, urban agriculture, waste management, and the costs and benefits of green approaches are laying the foundation for future development. This plan has relied on high public participation.

CONCLUSION

A general understanding of several waterfronts begins to suggest which waterfronts might make for the most beneficial comparisons. Those waterfronts can be studied in further depth. By looking to other urban waterfronts we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the workings of a successful waterfront. This knowledge can contribute to the success of Seattle's Central Waterfront in the future, and perhaps avoid actions that are ultimately not appropriate to Seattle's circumstances.